

CONNECTIONS

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

February 2025

Volume 22

Number 5

February 7, 2025

Board of Directors Meeting

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

February 28, 2025

Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

March 7, 2025

Board of Directors Meeting

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

March 24, 2025

AMSD Day at the Capitol

[LINK: View Details for Day at the Capitol](#)

Unlocking Potential: Bloomington Public Schools Renaissance Program Expands Gifted Education Access



Bloomington Public Schools (BPS) is celebrating 20 years of gifted and talented (GT) programs. As one of the first districts in the state to adopt these programs, BPS has served thousands of highly academic and creatively gifted students from Bloomington and across the Twin Cities area. Programs have expanded over time, continuously responding to meet the evolving needs of learners.

The district's Dimensions Academy began offering programs for grades 4-5 and 6-7 in 2004, and now has six unique programs featuring 45 class offerings for academically and creatively gifted students in grades 2-12. As these programs grew, they reflected the increasing diversity in the community and school district. Additionally, program leaders and teachers were committed to providing opportunities for students who might typically be overlooked for gifted programs.

To support this innovative educational programming, BPS was awarded one of 13 U.S. Department of Education Jacob K. Javits grants, totaling \$2.5 million. The five-year grant focused on:

- Increasing K-1 achievement in math and reading through academic interventions
- Universal screening for high abilities in students
- Professional development for art, music, and phy ed specialists
- Increasing access to mirroring experiences through community partnerships
- Launching the new Renaissance program

Renaissance was introduced in 2022 to better serve traditionally underserved students, including students of color, twice-exceptional learners,

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AMSD's years of advocacy to tie the basic funding formula to inflation finally paid off in 2023 when the change was included in the omnibus education bill. This year we are seeing just how important that change was. As this month's research article outlines, the Governor's education budget proposal includes cuts to special education transportation funding and the elimination of the Q Comp program, but the inflationary increase in the formula is retained. We face significant challenges in the 2025 session. Please mark your calendar for the AMSD/MASA Region 9 Day at the Capitol on Monday, March 24 and join your colleagues in advocating for our students and our schools. Further details will be available soon.

From the AMSD Chair, Laura Oksnevad, St. Anthony-New Brighton Board Member

Renaissance Program Serves Underrepresented Learners

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economically disadvantaged students, and multilingual learners.

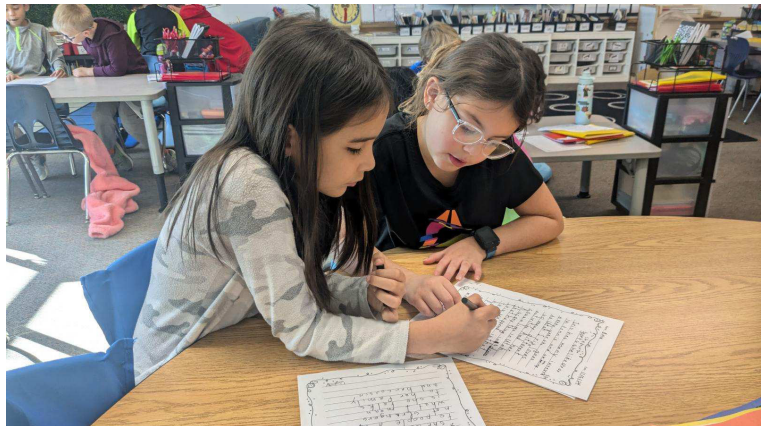
A key focus of the Renaissance initiative is identifying high-potential students early and providing robust academic interventions in kindergarten and first grade. During the 2023-24 school year, 87 percent of first graders in the district's Title I schools were assessed using the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). This universal screening helped uncover students with advanced math skills who may be behind in reading due to ongoing language development. This year, the district expanded universal screening to all first-grade students, with assessments available in students' home languages upon request.

"By identifying these students at a young age, and providing intentional academic support and interventions, we prepare students for opportunities that might not otherwise be available to them," said program coordinator Jillian Chapman.

The Javits grant also funded extra staff development to prepare students to continue in the elementary gifted program. Paraprofessionals received 50+ hours of training by the BPS GT team. Topics included: characteristics of gifted learners, instructional strategies and resources, creative thinking tools, scaffolding for learning, sensory needs, and learning through play. Additionally, 10 team members from Renaissance schools attended the state symposium and a national convention for teachers to have access to external professional learning.

Chapman said one of the benefits of the additional staff training is that teachers and specialists now see the strengths and challenges of gifted learners as assets, and can find ways to use them in their instruction.

Midway through the second year, through early identification, intentional academic intervention and support, and expansive staff training, the results are promising. Renaissance students are surpassing their peers on reading and math growth. Comparing spring 2024 MAP scores in math with the previous year, Renaissance students are outperforming their grade-level peers, showing 187 percent growth year over year. Renaissance students are also meeting their MAP growth targets, with an impressive 94 percent of students meeting growth targets in math and 88 percent of students meeting their targets in reading.



The Renaissance program provides robust academic interventions for typically underrepresented students.

"These results really show the impact of students receiving the resources they need to meet individual growth targets," said Chapman.

Chapman emphasized the long history of strong gifted instruction and best practices within BPS is key to the Renaissance program. "Gifted learners need something different, not better," she said. "Expanding programs to include highly academically and creatively talented, and highly able students allowed BPS to serve more students. Renaissance creates even more opportunities because of the great programs already in place."

The gifted and talented team also supports enrichment clubs and teams, summer acceleration opportunities, and collaboration with K-12 teachers across the district.

This month's member feature was submitted by Kate Martin, Director of Marketing and Communications, Bloomington Public Schools.

Governor's Budget Proposal: Hold Harmless on Compensatory Revenue, Cuts to Special Education Transportation, Elimination of Q Comp

Gov. Tim Walz released his biennial budget recommendations on Jan. 16 and — not surprisingly after a weak November State Budget and Economic Forecast — the education budget is lean. The November forecast projected a \$616 million surplus for the 26-27 biennium but a \$5 billion-plus shortfall in the 28-29 biennium. The forecast, and the Governor's budget, include an inflationary increase in the basic formula as is required following passage of the 2023 Education Bill linking the formula to inflation.

The [2025 AMSD platform](#), which was developed prior to the release of the November forecast, calls for an additional three percent increase in the basic funding formula along with a \$250 per pupil increase in local optional revenue. The platform reflects inflationary pressures, the rising cost of labor, and increased expectations placed on school districts over the past two years. Districts throughout the state are facing significant budget challenges and are looking to state policymakers to mitigate projected funding shortfalls and staff layoffs.

While a few of the Governor's proposals touch on issues included in AMSD's platform — a modified hold-harmless proposal for compensatory revenue and funding to cover one more summer of unemployment insurance costs — the budget largely proposes more modifications and fine-tuning than new initiatives.

Among highlights from the Governor's proposed budget:

- **Reduction in Special Education Transportation Reimbursement.** The Governor is proposing to change the percentage of transportation costs that are eligible for reimbursement under the initial aid calculation in the state special education funding formula. This results in a reduction of \$48,628,000 in FY26-27 and \$54,860,000 in FY28-29.
- **Alternative Teacher Compensation Revenue (Q Comp).** Gov. Walz has recommended eliminating the Alternative Teacher Professional Pay program starting in FY27. This results in a reduction of \$78.705 million in FY26-27 and \$173.137 million in FY28-29. There would also be a \$39.5 million reduction in levy reduction beginning in FY27. Due to the 90/10 metered payments, \$8.837 million will need to be appropriated in FY27 for reconciliation payments from FY26. This program will remain in place for FY26 and then be eliminated in FY27.
- **Compensatory Revenue Modification.** The Governor has recommended \$39.7 million in FY26 and \$4.4 million in FY27 to extend a hold harmless provision for the compensatory revenue calculation into FY26. While many AMSD member districts would see financial relief under the Governor's proposal, some would receive less compensatory funding than they would under current law. The Governor is also recommending \$94,000 in FY26 only to create a compensatory revenue working group.
- **Additional Unemployment Insurance Aid for Hourly Workers.** Gov. Walz is recommending \$30 million for FY26 in onetime unemployment insurance aid — the estimated amount needed to add to the projected carryover from the end of FY25 to FY26 from a onetime appropriation in FY24, to cover total expected costs associated with providing hourly school workers unemployment benefits during the summer term. Unless the Governor and legislators identify a permanent funding stream, this cost will fall on school districts starting in FY27.

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Governor's Budget Proposal First Step in Process

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- **Literacy Incentive Aid Formula Change.** The Governor recommends changing how Literacy Incentive Aid is allocated by eliminating the use of MCA data as a factor for determining allocations to districts and instead using poverty data. This recommendation is budget neutral for the state but it will have distributional impacts on school districts with some districts realizing additional revenue and others seeing a reduction in Literacy Incentive Aid.
- **Student Support Personnel Aid Allowable Uses.** The Governor recommends expanding the authorized uses for the Student Support Personnel Aid (SSPA) and a revised distribution method to distribute student support personnel aid directly to eligible cooperatives. This is a cost-neutral proposal that only expands the current uses of student support personnel in statute. This proposal would allow LEAs, who have in good faith attempted to but are unable to hire a student support personnel or secure contracted services from licensed student support personnel, to use funding for:
 - Maintaining student support personnel positions if they will be lost due to enrollment declines.
 - Covering the costs of planning and implementing training and job embedded coaching: in social emotional learning, trauma informed/anti-bias practices, evidenced based/informed mental health interventions, and comprehensive school mental health.
 - Covering the material costs of evidence-based, culturally responsive curriculums and programs that proactively support students and school community wellbeing. This can include, but is not limited to, social emotional learning curriculum and supplemental materials, and tiered intervention programs for social, emotional, and/or behavioral needs.
- **Fraud Detection and Prevention.** The Governor has recommended \$550,000 annually to fund three full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and software to provide needed support for MDE infrastructure to prevent, identify, and take action against program participants who are found to have engaged in fraud, waste, and abuse.
- **Statewide Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Grant.** The Governor recommends \$5 million in FY26 and \$2 million in FY27 from the workforce development fund to support establishment of a statewide registered teacher apprenticeship program. Funds will be used to support the development of a statewide registered teacher apprenticeship program and joint apprenticeship training committee (JATC). This JATC will provide critical statewide infrastructure for school districts across the state to connect to consistent, high-quality teacher apprenticeship programming and will scale registered teacher apprenticeship in a timely and cost-effective manner, creating additional career pathways into education for individuals from underrepresented populations and underserved communities.

The Governor's budget proposal is the first step in the budget setting process. The next step will be the release of the February State Budget and Economic Forecast which is scheduled to be released around March 6. At that point, the Governor will revise his recommendations and House and Senate members will develop their respective budget proposals.

- [LINK: View the Governor's full recommendations for MDE Education budget](#)
- [LINK: View the Statewide Compensatory Runs for FY25 and FY26](#)
- [LINK: View the AMSD Districts Compensatory Revenue Comparisons for FY25 and FY26](#)